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Syrian-Soviet Military Relations: West Soviet
Withdrawal from Syria

Relations between Damascus and Moscow, since the mid-July Egyptian order for the withdrawal of Soviet military personnel, have not changed noticeably. The USSR is continuing to implement, and perhaps speed up, its military aid deliveries to Syria. There has been no perceptible change in the level of its military advisory mission in the country, which stood at about 800 at the end of 1971. Although the Syrians have no intention of following Cairo's example in requesting the departure of Soviet military personnel en masse, contracts for some key military command structure types will not be renewed as they run out. This decision does not apply to most Soviet military personnel, who are said to be doing a good job.

Damascus received its first delivery of some 50 Soviet T-62 tanks in mid-August, making Syria the second Middle Eastern country after Egypt to get this tank. The T-62 is a more advanced model than the T-54/55s that make up the main force of Syria's armored corps. In addition, ten Soviet military-related AN-12s flew to Damascus between 9-30 August, the first Soviet airlift to Syria since 1967. These flights followed the return of Syrian military personnel from SA-3 training in the USSR and may have been involved in transporting SA-3 associated equipment and training aid needed to set up facilities in Syria.

The newly arrived T-62 tanks and the SA-3 missile system were ordered by Syria under a military agreement signed in early 1971. A new military accord, which was arranged in February 1972 and signed during Soviet Defense Minister Grechko's visit to Damascus in May, reportedly

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calls for the USSR to supply additional military hardware. Moscow was hoping that Syria would sign a friendship treaty in return for its newest arms commitment. They have apparently tempered these requests following the Soviet expulsion in Egypt. They now seem intent on gaining assurances for their military presence in Syria, as well as guarantees that Soviet naval units will be allowed to continue their use of Syrian port facilities.

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